



“THE ROMAN WALL IN SCOTLAND.”¹

BY GEORGE MACDONALD, M.A., LL.D.



R. MACDONALD, the learned son of a learned father, has conferred a great debt on all antiquaries who have been troubled by the many vexed questions relating to the northern Roman Wall, about which archæologists have fought as fiercely as Picts and Scots contended with their Southern neighbours. The genesis of this book is a series of lectures delivered before the University of Glasgow last year. It appeals both to the ordinary cultivated reader and the specialist, and is written by one who has studied on the spot the many problems connected with the Wall, and discussed them with Professor Haverfield and other experts; while the abundance of admirable plates, fifty-five in number, enables the reader to follow in the footsteps of so well-equipped a guide. The earliest mention of fortifications between the Clyde and Forth occurs in Tacitus, when the historian records the prowess of his father-in-law Agricola, who, in 81 A.D., formed “an ultimate frontier-line” in Britain. He built certain fortified posts along the narrow strip of land between Clota and Bodotria (Clyde and Forth), and occupied “the entire sweep of country to the south, so that the enemy were pushed back into what was virtually another island.” This chain of forts was not the “Roman Wall”—that came later. But Agricola, through the machinations of his enemies at Rome, was recalled in the midst of his triumphs, and the turbulent northern tribes again obtained sway over the southern country.

¹ James Maclehose and Sons, Glasgow. 14s. net.

Later on, Hadrian's Wall was built. Then we hear of the "Wall of Turf" erected during the reign of Antoninus Pius, and inscribed stones prove that this stood between the Forth and Clyde, probably erected in 142 A.D. Here we may note that Dr. Macdonald is an enthusiastic numismatist, who knows more about coins than almost any other writer living; and he has put this knowledge to excellent use in this work, the coins found at various places on the Wall and elsewhere furnishing much evidence that is valuable with regard to dates and persons. Bede refers to this wall of turf, a rampart of great breadth and height, as also to the more substantial English Northumbrian wall. The author then gives us an admirable study of the historical background, the organisation of the Roman army, the Roman frontier policy and frontier posts; and then we come to the actual remains and to the tracing of the Wall. Dr. Macdonald has traversed the whole ground on foot more than once, visited doubtful points several times, and brought into consultation experts and friends as keen as himself in order to arrive at the truth. The result is that his conclusions may be accepted with the utmost confidence, and if he has not solved every difficulty, it must be that the problems are incapable of solution. The stones of Rough Castle and Castlecary still bear witness to the might of the conquerors. It is sad to reflect that the ravages of the last 200 years have done more harm to existing remains than any attacks of the wild Caledonians on the walls and forts. The author calls attention to the fact that this interesting national monument is in danger of destruction, and in some parts of being entirely swept away, and pleads for a thorough investigation of the sites that still admit of search. It will not be creditable to Scotland if the work remains undone.

